

Top Ten Things I Didn't Learn in Library School

by

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After graduating from Indiana University's School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) in December of 1995 with my MLS, I began working as the Instructional Services librarian at the University of Southern Indiana (USI) in Evansville, Indiana, in January 1996. Throughout my daily routine, I find myself using many applications, theories, and ideas taught at SLIS. In addition, each day is a learning experience at USI where much of my time is spent interacting with students, librarians, and support staff at the university, as well as staying aware of current trends in technology and instruction.

After one year, I am taking a moment to reflect — and believe me, it is a moment — upon many things not taught or emphasized enough during my graduate school training. Below is a list of ten items in no particular order that I have found challenging during my first year. I hope this list will help prepare future graduates for the challenges and responsibilities that await them once they begin a career as a professional librarian.

1. Technology 101

Tweezers. Yes, that is right, I said tweezers — which can be used to remove paper jams from printers and copy machines. Besides all the marvelous equipment that is available, one needs to know what *type* of tweezers to purchase. My recommendation would be a pointed, sharp pair. On a more serious note, exposure to various hi-tech equipment (besides an overhead projector!) would have been beneficial to me. Currently, I work with an LCD projector and have experimented and researched on my own to find out which type of equipment is best for my instruction environment and why.

2. Evaluation Methodologies

Evaluating a program or class is a challenge when what you have been taught was evaluating reference materials. Every program needs evaluating to decide if the goals and objectives are being met. The planning,

preparing, developing, and reviewing of results is essential to every instruction program. I distribute evaluations at each instruction session. I have learned to expect slow response time and a variety of positive and negative comments. This is just one of several ways to evaluate a program. I encourage future graduates to pick the evaluation methodology that best suits their instruction program.

3. How To Write Policies

Could it be that after a year I still have nothing to say? Almost. I have just completed writing my first official policy for the Instruction Department. Now with the stamp of approval — and yes, everything has to be approved and usually revised several times before it is ready to send out — I can now begin to implement the policy and prepare to revise it.

4. How To Supervise Student Workers

Working with students in a variety of settings is something I enjoy. I hired a student worker in late September to work eleven to fifteen hours a week. Sad to say, this one did not stay. The student quit because the job was too far to travel to; however, the individual was a student at the university...hmmm. I searched for another student and found an excellent worker who very seldom showed up for work. Needless to say, I began searching for the third one. Finally, after many searches, I found a student who not only comes to work, but is an excellent worker (crossing my fingers as I write). Supervising student workers can be a challenging yet rewarding job, when you finally get the right one.

5. How To Write An Annual Report

An employer during the time I was in library school once told me to write down everything that I do throughout the year and keep it. When the time comes to write an annual report for the previous year, all the information I need will be easy to access. I listened to her advice and she was right! However, I still find it challenging to complete an annual report with and adapt these notes into required categories such as professional performance, scholarship, professional activity, and service. So, take my advice and the advice of a former employer — keep track of what you do, with whom you do it, and when and why you do it. By the way, I am completing mine now. Thank goodness for all my notes and the good advice!

6. Search Committees

Recently, I was selected to be a member of a search committee to hire a new librarian at our library. Having recently been an interviewee, I knew

exactly what to expect on that side of an interview situation. However, being one of the search committee members, I was faced with the following: what questions are appropriate, what conversation is "suitable" for meals, and how to evaluate resumes and cover letters. Nevertheless, it was a learning experience that will help me with future prospective candidates for our library.

7. Working With Faculty

Each experience with faculty members will be different in university environments. Many faculty will understand the different components of the library, the importance of library instruction, and the importance of research, based upon their background and experience with libraries. I encourage future graduates to work with faculty members, whether one-to-one or through a department. With support and encouragement for students about the importance of library instruction, the relationships between faculty and librarians will be more successful.

8. How To Set-up a Program

When I began in January 1996, the instruction program was conducted part-time by the Technical Services librarian. She barely had time to revise the program, create handouts, and involve the students in a more active learning approach. Having little experience in this area, I learned to rely on the following to improve and make the instruction program effective: the Bibliographic Instruction Listserv (BI-L), the library staff at USI, and librarians at various other institutions. In addition, I use feedback from colleagues, faculty, and students, and read and study the literature on the topic of bibliographic instruction. I have discovered that setting up a program is trial and error and requires the willingness to experiment in order to involve the students in a more active learning environment.

9. How To Teach Effectively — Instructional Ability

What ideas are necessary to stimulate or enhance active learning techniques? How do you teach students to evaluate material for their research and convince them that everything does not have to be retrieved through a computer? How do you handle classroom discipline? These are the types of questions raised when I began in my current position. With a background in education, I was prepared to handle various discipline problems, maintain classroom control, and teach my subject effectively. Although when the students are not "yours" and you have them for only fifty minutes, it becomes a challenge to convince them of the importance of library instruction and to handle discipline and/or behavior problems which may arise.

10. Handouts/Instruction Material Design

How many of us had the opportunity to prepare a handout in library school? I had no previous practice with layout and design for handouts in a university setting. During my graduate studies, I accumulated various handouts, pamphlets, and brochures to have them as examples. Thank goodness for Indiana University Libraries, trips to American Library Association conferences, and visits to other libraries. I was able to use these materials, along with the ones currently available at the USI Library, and format them to fit the needs of our patrons and this library (Note to future graduates: start compiling a folder of various handouts — you will use them!)

Of course, no MLS can provide all the training one needs. Inevitably, there will be on-the-job-training and lifelong learning. A solid MLS program prepared me to know how to proceed on my own and overcome future obstacles during my career as a librarian.